

# NOVEL IDEAS

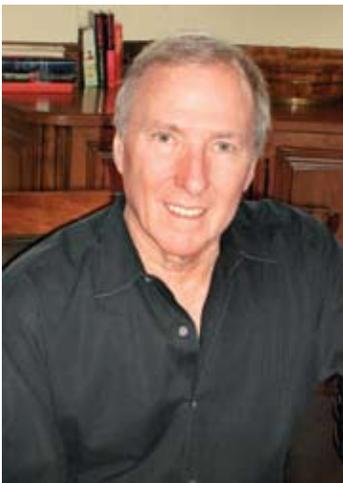
BY LINDA L. MEIERHOFFER

Whether it's a crime-ridden page-turner or a supernatural tale that chills audiences worldwide on a cinema screen, what makes the bestselling authors of these works tick?

"If writing were illegal, I'd be in prison...It's a compulsion," states novelist David Baldacci, in Meredith Maran's new book, "Why We Write: 20 acclaimed authors on how and why they do what they do." Baldacci tells how his first book, a political thriller titled "Absolute Power," garnered a \$2 million advance in the late '90s even before it topped the bestseller list and became a film starring Clint Eastwood and Gene Hackman.

The native Virginian has 25 novels to his credit, but one need not look far to find equally prolific and successful wordsmiths with ties to our desert. While some at the pinnacle have passed on, there are others named Wambaugh, Neiderman, Rice and Wouk who feel the pull of the Coachella Valley. Here's what they say about the business that Andrew Neiderman calls "60 percent talent and 40 percent perseverance."

## THE COP



Joseph Wambaugh was a cop and a "closet scribbler" for years. This son of a policeman was fresh out of college with an English degree when he heard cops made more money and had better benefits than teachers. He used that career as the backdrop for his books.

"My many years of police work had afforded me chances to see people at times when others seldom or never see them," Wambaugh says. "All I really believed was that my stories were interesting...it was just discipline and stubbornness that kept me trying."

Wambaugh remained with the Los Angeles Police Department through two bestselling novels, "The New Centurions" (a New York Times bestseller for 36 weeks) and "The Blue Knight."

"In 1972, my wife Dee and I met Truman Capote on 'The Tonight Show,' and he invited us to his home in Palm Springs where we fell in love with the desert," recalls Wambaugh. "It was there beside his pool on a scorching summer day that I told Truman the true story of 'The Onion Field' that I was thinking about writing. He said 'I'd love to write that book.' That did it; I took a leave of absence and wrote it."

The Wambaughs live in Rancho Mirage, and although surrounded by the sun and fun for which this area is famous, Joe has no plans to retire: "I love to work and hate leisure," he says, sounding just like the diehard cops he writes about.

## THE TEACHER

An English major like Wambaugh, Andrew Neiderman toiled as a teacher in the same high school where he had graduated, sending out poems and stories trying to get published. "I could have papered the house with my rejections," Neiderman says now. "I compare myself to a tightrope walker—you can't look down, you have to continually look forward." That attitude, plus the support and confidence of his literary agents, were early career breakthroughs.

His "next opportunity of a lifetime" came when he was tapped to be the ghostwriter for V. C. Andrews following her death. "That was more than 25 years ago. The franchise is now more than 106 million books published in 95 countries," he reports.

Neiderman and Diane, his wife of 49 years, live in Palm Springs, where he's set a number of his novels. "The beauty of the desert itself is inspiring; there's something sacred about it." He credits Diane for taking on more family obligations during those early years so that he could write. "I wouldn't be where I am without her."

KEANU REEVES

AL PACINO



The newest attorney  
at the world's most  
powerful law firm  
has never lost a case.

But he's about to lose  
his soul.

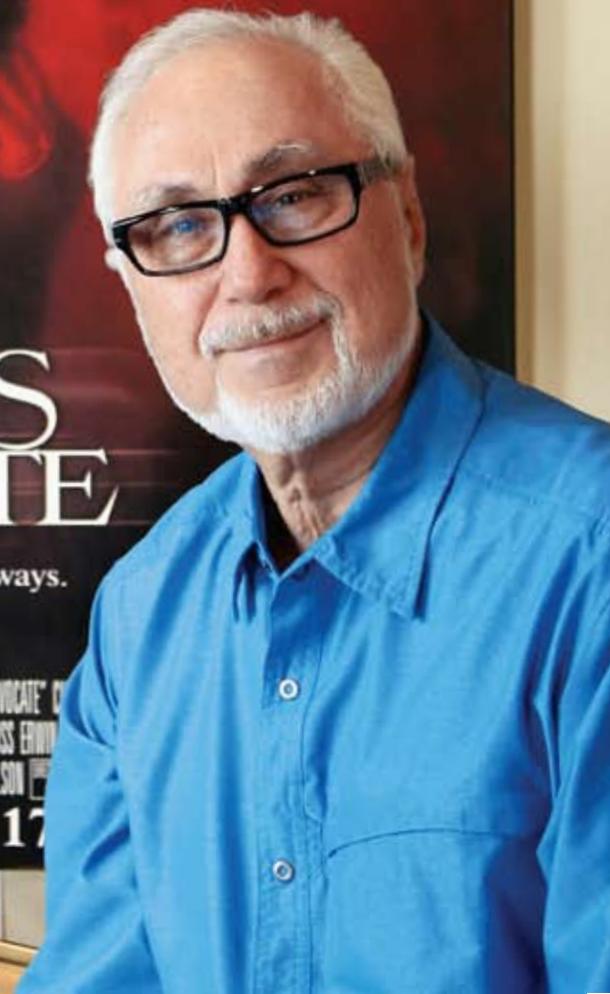
# A DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

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OPENS OCTOBER 17



Andrew  
Neiderman

And his powerful, one-line pitch to Hollywood executives—“It’s about a law firm in New York that represents only guilty people and never loses”—took his work to the big screen. “A producer optioned ‘The Devil’s Advocate,’ and sold it to Warner Brothers. It became a big movie for them with Al Pacino, Keanu Reeves and Charlize Theron.” Like Wambaugh, retirement isn’t in his vocabulary. “We’re in development on the stage musical of ‘The Devil’s Advocate’ in London,” he says, “and I’m meeting some major producers in Hollywood to develop a TV series...I am my work.”

### THE SON

“I’ve never had a residence of my own in the Coachella Valley—just a lot of visits to Mom and one novel I set largely in the high desert,” says bestselling LA writer Christopher Rice of his book, “Blind Fall,” which takes place in and around the Morongo Valley. “Mom” is Anne Rice, whose desert home at the time was in Rancho Mirage.

The 35-year-old son of the novelist with the vampire cult following and the late poet Stan Rice, Chris says he knew he’d use this area in a book the first time he set eyes on it. “I think the Coachella Valley is one of the most beautiful places on earth,” he says. “It’s that clear California sunlight that seems to have a power all its own. It either inspires people or drives them mad, but I thrive on it.”

He says “secrets can kill” is the primary theme that fuels his writing, whether it’s in his upcoming supernatural thriller set in New Orleans, “The Heavens Rise,” or a novel that mixes fact with fiction like “Blind Fall.” Rice admits that there was a lot of initial publicity driven by the fact he’s “Anne Rice’s gay son,” but says “Blind Fall” gave him the gratification he was seeking. “I had written it from the point of view of a heterosexual, battle-scarred Marine,” Rice says. “When several Marines told me that I had captured what it means to them to serve—well, I can’t remember a moment in my career more gratifying than that.”

### THE STATESMAN

One of the most widely read writers in the world, Herman Wouk, penned the panoramic World War II classics “The Winds of War” and “War and Remembrance” and received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1952 for “The Caine Mutiny.” At 97, he is intensely private and no longer grants interviews. But his secretary, Nubia McGraw, says that he’s lived in Palm Springs since the late ‘80s, “and continues to draw inspiration from this valley; he’s writing as we speak.” Until her death in 2011, his wife Betty Sarah was his editor and literary agent. Wouk pays homage to her in “The Lawgiver,” his recent book that’s described as a lighthearted novel about—wait for it—Moses.



Christopher Rice



Herman Wouk

### THEIR WORDS LIVE ON

**Zane Grey**, the great Western fiction writer of the early 1900s who made frontier adventures come alive, called Palm Springs’ Mesa neighborhood home. His “Wanderer of the Wasteland” included scenes set in the Indian Canyons.

**Raymond Chandler** created a tough-talking private eye named Philip Marlowe that Humphrey Bogart brought to life on screen. Upon the author’s death, Marlowe was solving crimes in “Poodle Springs”—a mocking reference to the Palm Springs area where Chandler once lived.

**Sidney Sheldon**, reputed to be the seventh bestselling author of all time, with works including “The Other Side of Midnight,” which were all begun after a prolific career in film, on Broadway and in television and...

**Harold Robbins**, with over 25 bestsellers including “The Carpetbaggers,” were both Vista Las Palmas residents and Wouk contemporaries. They gave us crime thrillers with determined female protagonists and lustful tales with bodice-ripping sexual encounters, respectively, during their bountiful careers.

The diminutive **Truman Capote** of “In Cold Blood” and “Breakfast at Tiffany’s” fame was spotted living in an a unit of the Albert Frey–designed Villa Hermosa complex and also in a rental in the El Mirador neighborhood in the 1960s and ‘70s.

**Ray Bradbury**, who passed away last summer and who loved magic as a boy, penned “The Martian Chronicles,” which he called “fantasy,” and also “Fahrenheit 451” about a futuristic society where books are banned. The man with the big imagination once lived in Palm Springs’ Twin Palms.